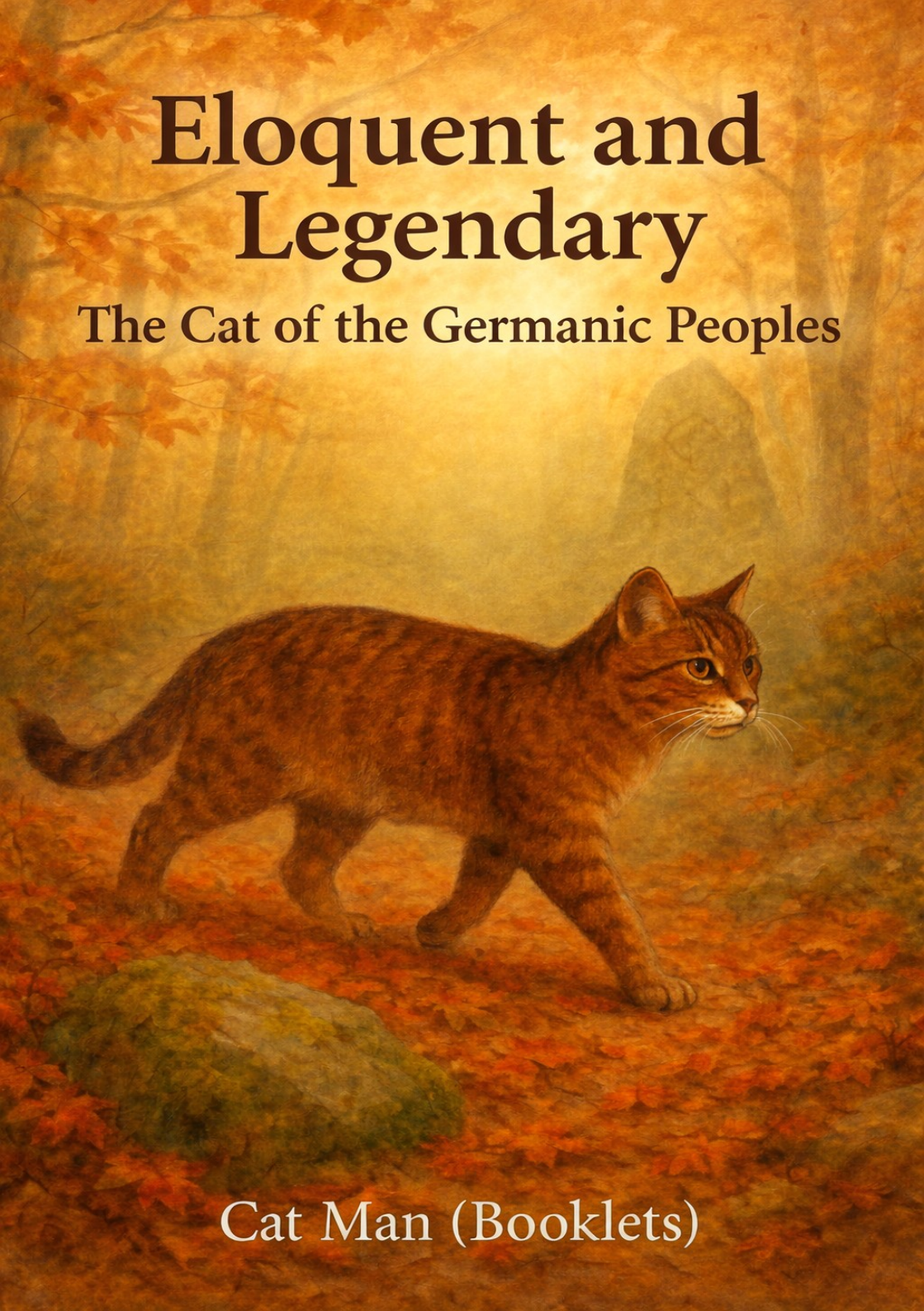
Eloquent and Legendary

The Cat of the Germanic Peoples



Cat Man (Booklets)

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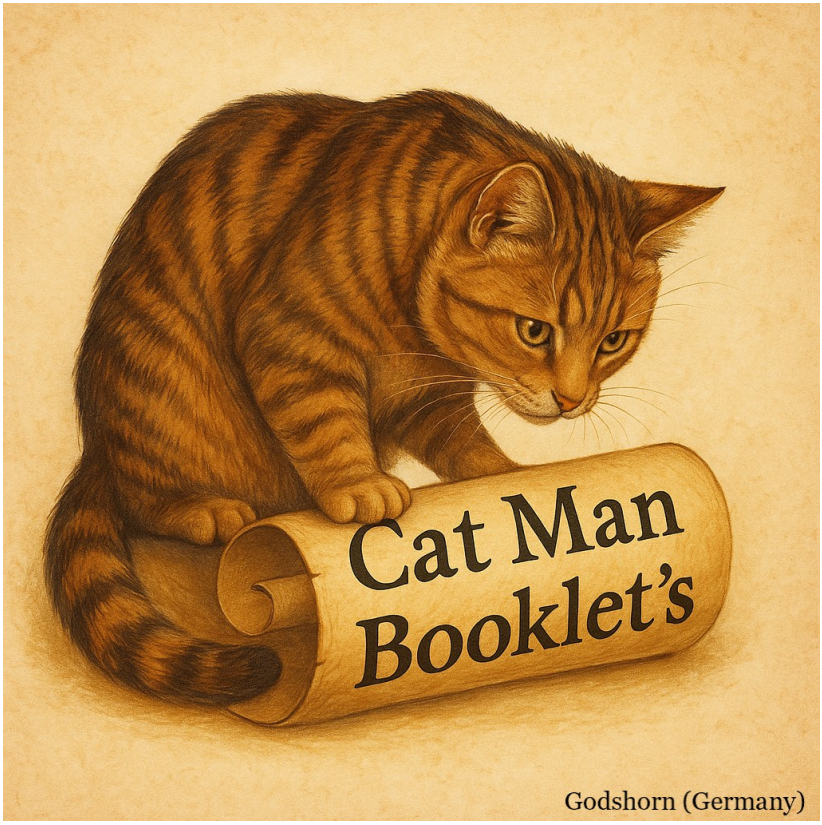
The Cat of the Germanic Peoples



Eloquent and shrouded in legend
The cat of the Germanic tribes

Rustling forests, whispering springs,
Streaming waves playing with premonitions,
Complain with me!
Tell me, oh tell me!
Miesmies, the lovely one, where has she gone,
Young man in love, young man, where has he
embraced Miesmies, the sweet lady?
Comfort the anxious.
Comfort the grief-stricken cat!
Moonlight, oh moonlight,
Tell me where my
Well-behaved child, lovely creature!
Angry pain can never heal!
Desolate lover, wise advisor,
Hurry to save him
From the chains of love,
Help him, oh help the desperate tomcat.

This love song is both for a cat and written by a cat, by the wisest, most educated, most spiritual cat that ever lived on earth, by a German cat: the tomcat Murr. This tomcat Murr, moved by "longing for the higher," as another of his poems is called, pursued the sciences instead of mice. Sitting on his master's desk, he learned to read and write, studied the finest works of world literature, and even wrote some immortal works himself:

"Thought and Premonition, or Cat and Dog" was his first work,
"On Mouse Traps and Their Influence on the Disposition and Energy of Catness" was his second highly acclaimed work.
He published his poems, sayings, and impromptus under the title "What I Gave Birth to in Hours of Enthusiasm."
His book "The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr" became truly world-famous, an autobiography that remained unfinished due to the author's early death. E. T. A. Hofmann deserves credit for discovering this book and publishing it for an astonished posterity.

Although Murr the cat did not lead a life of writing, but rather behaved in a completely un-philistine manner, drinking heartily in the company of his cat friends, even making a name for himself among dogs, knowing how to fight fiercely and love passionately, he always returned to poetry, finding comfort and bliss in writing verses. He wrote:

Yes, art! You child of high spheres,
You comforter in deepest sorrow,
O! - Let me always give birth to verses
With ingenious ease.
And: "Murr," say noble women,
High-spirited youths, "O Murr,
You poet's heart, a tender trust
Your sweet murmuring awakens in the breast!"

Murr was also quite proud of his extraordinary abilities. He does not skimp on self-praise in his autobiography. He says candidly of himself: "I regard myself with the deepest satisfaction."

The early days of the German cat

German cat culture would never have reached such heights if cats had not been a favored animal among the Germanic peoples from the very beginning: The ancient Germanic goddess Freya, wife of the sun god Baldur and the most beautiful of all female beings, always appeared accompanied by cats: Two cats pulled her chariot. Those who cared for and loved cats could hope for the goddess's affection and protection; they could expect peace in the home and in marriage, sweet nights of love, and Sunday children, for all domestic and feminine virtues were under Freya's protection.

But the time when cats had divine status did not last long. When the Germanic peoples were gradually Christianized in the 4th century, the thrones of the old gods were overthrown; and along with Freya, cats were also sent into exile. However, because cats could not be eliminated from the world as easily as a goddess, but continued to reproduce, Christians believed that cats were a symbol of paganism rising up against the new religion.

They regarded cats as harbingers of everything unchristian, satanic, and evil. The monk Berthold of Regensburg, who lived from 1220 to 1272, preached about cats: "The breath that comes from their throats is pestilence; and when they drink water and a tear falls from their eyes, the spring is spoiled: anyone who drinks from it thereafter will meet certain death."

As the companion animals of witches or the devil himself, countless cats had to give their lives in the Middle Ages.

Gustav Michel provides some information on this in his "Book of Cats": "The sheer number of victims can be seen from the fact that in the seven years from 1587 to 1593, twenty villages near the capital (Trier) alone delivered 360 people to the stake.

Towards the end of the 16th century, around 500 witches were burned in Geneva in a period of three months, and Ludovicus Paramo reports that the Inquisition burned 30,000 witches at the stake in 150 years. But it was not only witches and sorceresses—often enough scholars as well—who were burned; thousands of cats also had to end up in the flames as witches.

Cats appeared in almost all witch trials and were also condemned. "The people say: a twenty-year-old cat becomes a witch, a hundred-year-old witch becomes a cat again," reports Jacob Grimm in his "German Mythology." So it is not surprising that countless German legends tell of witch cats.

In all kinds of versions, the story of the master's wife, who is a witch and roams around at night as a vicious cat, has been passed down; a brave lad cuts off the cat's paw, whereupon the witch is missing a hand or a foot and is exposed.

Witch cats are not to be trifled with! Once, when a farmhand came across a group of cats performing a witch's dance, he recognized among them Mitzla, whom he knew detested nothing more than garlic, and called out mischievously: "Hey, Mitzla! Would you like a clove of garlic?" The cat replied, "And you? Would you like a bad leg?" From that moment on, the farmhand had a bad leg and could not be cured for the rest of his life.

Another witch cat ruined a farmer's livestock because he had mistreated her. The cat was leisurely strolling through the barn when the farmer chased her away with his whip. Like a whirlwind, the cat raced over the backs of the horses and cows, and she did not spare the pigs either. The next day, all the animals stopped eating; they lost weight and died a miserable death!

Anyone who is harassed by a witch cat has a hard time getting rid of it. Not everyone is as fearless as the man who set out to learn the art of horror and, as reported in Grimm's Fairy Tales, promptly clamped the cats that harassed him at midnight in a vice and cut off their claws. More by chance than skill, a man from Leuven escaped the witch cats: he had stayed late in a tavern and came across the market square at an eerie hour. The whole square was full of cats, all holding each other by their front paws and dancing around a large table on which stood a cup of wine; one after the other, they took a sip from the cup.

"Drink with us!" one of the cats invited the man, holding out the cup to him. But the man was terrified. "Drink! Drink!" the cats began to shout wildly, jumping up at him, and sweat ran down his face in streams. He was about to give in to their demands out of sheer fear when, luckily, his nose started to itch: he had to sneeze and habitually called out, "God bless you!" At these words, the cats burst into a pitiful howl and scattered like a storm wind through the air.

A more reliable protection than "God bless you" is a knife with three crosses carved into its blade.

Such a knife served a young man who once encountered two cats at a crossroads at night. The cats stood in front of the man's feet, so that he could not take another step. But he gathered all his strength and kicked at the cats.

Instantly, they multiplied, and the lad found himself surrounded by a growling and hissing pack. He would certainly have come to harm if he had not had the knife with the three crosses with him. He hurled it among the cats, and with one blow, all the haunting was gone.

To discourage witches from turning themselves into cats, many places had what were known as "biting cats." These were large barrels into which women were placed so that only their heads protruded. Two by two, those suspected of being witches were placed together in this manner and had to snarl and revile each other for the general amusement of the crowd until one of them had had enough: this one was then considered convicted and had to climb the stake as a witch. The victor, on the other hand, was considered cured and was freed from the biting cat.

According to medieval belief, however, very evil cats were possessed not only by a witch, but by the devil himself. In Cronswitz, the devil is even said to have succeeded in taking the form of a cat in the rectory to enjoy good care! It was only when a visitor once uttered the magic spell:

Rie, Ra, Ranze
Go out and dance!

the cat had to jump down from the warm vicar's stove bench and was never allowed to be seen in the house again.

Cat divination, cat magic and cat weather

If the kitten washes itself,
I'll meet my sweetheart!

This is probably the most harmless thing a cat can announce according to old folk beliefs. However the cat behaves, it usually means something bad: if a cat grooms itself under the window of a room where a sick person is lying, the sick person will die. And anyone who watches a cat wash itself will be beaten up by someone on the same day. However, it may be worth putting up with the beating: the direction in which the cat is sitting while washing itself indicates where the wind will blow from the next day, and whether the cat is washing itself carelessly or thoroughly indicates how strong this wind will be.

In many cases, cats herald arguments: if they fight in front of a door, there will soon be a "catfight" among the people behind the door, i.e., a quarrel. That is why people who wish ill on a bride and groom release two cats tied together by their tails in front of the newlyweds' house. A marriage will also be unhappy if a cat is seen around the altar in the church shortly before the wedding ceremony. Furthermore, quarrels arise wherever a cat coughs. Even if a cat meows, this can have unpleasant consequences: if you try to chase it away at that moment, you will get a swollen arm and a swollen face.

In any case, caution is advised when dealing with cats: When moving house, the cat must not be taken with you immediately, otherwise there will be a death in the family. A pregnant woman should not kick a cat with her foot, otherwise she will have a difficult delivery. You should not hit or drown a cat, otherwise you will be unhappy for seven years. And a carter should beware of taking a cat on his cart, because otherwise the horses will tire very quickly.

It always means something when a cat appears in a dream. If someone dreams of a fight with a cat, there is a thief in the house; if they gain the upper hand over the cat in the dream, they will succeed in catching the thief. If they also know the cat, they also know the thief. However, if the dreamer cries out and wakes up because they believe they have been injured by the cat and lost the fight, the thief will already be long gone with their belongings, and days of sorrow and perhaps even illness lie ahead.

There are also countless magical practices involving cats that are supposed to bring good luck or harm to oneself. Sacrificing cats was also common in Germany. In addition, it was recommended that a cat be allowed to enter every new house first: all evil spirits would then enter this first arrival. For the same reason, in the Ore Mountains, when the cattle return from the pastures to the villages in autumn, a cat is allowed to enter every stable first.

The help of cats is also necessary for the grain to thrive: When the first seeds are sown, a black tomcat must be killed and buried in the field; it will prevent all evil spirits from hindering the growth of the grain.

In Transylvania and Pomerania, cats were also buried under fruit trees so that the fruit would ripen nicely. If the well-grown fruit was then stolen, another cat had to be buried, but alive: with it, the thief would also die.

In meteorology, cats played a decisive role in the days before scientific meteorology existed, due to their supposed relationship with weather-making witches:
If a cat eats grass or licks its bottom, or if it washes itself more thoroughly than usual, it will rain.

If the cat drinks a noticeable amount of water, it will soon snow, and if it constantly turns its tail toward the oven or stove, you must prepare for frost. Particularly bad signs are when the cat sneezes, grooms itself against the grain, scratches its tail, or rubs against a broom: then a storm or a heavy thunderstorm is approaching.

When the storm arrives, be careful not to seek shelter under the same tree or in the same barn as a cat, because lightning often strikes cats! The most alarming sign, however, is when the cat becomes nervous, dances around frantically, scratches wildly at the front door, and strives to get outside at all costs:
Then it is best to leave the house immediately! The cat's restless behavior indicates an earthquake!

According to popular belief, the weather can also be influenced by feeding a cat a treat or throwing it into water: in the first case, you can expect good weather; in the second, you can expect rain.

The cat in fairy tales

In German fairy tales, cats no longer appear as demons, but at most as good and helpful spirits. Many fairy tales offer an explanation for the cat's unusual behavior, while others simply recount a miraculous event in which a cat played an important role. One famous fairy tale is:

THE CAT AND THE SPARROW

A sparrow flew onto a farmer's freshly fertilized field and feasted. Then a cat caught it, carried it away, and wanted to eat it. But the sparrow said, "No gentleman eats breakfast without first washing his mouth." The cat took this to heart, sat down on the ground, and began to wash his mouth with his paw—and the sparrow flew away. This annoyed the cat immensely, and he called after the sparrow: "As long as I live, I will always have breakfast first and only then wash my mouth!" And so he has done to this day.

In the Netherlands, this fairy tale is told differently:

A cat had caught a rat and was about to eat it. But then it changed its mind and thought: "After all, the German emperor's cat is my cousin! I owe it to my status to behave properly, even if no one is watching me. I want to wash myself before I eat!" So she put the rat down and rubbed her mouth and nose. But the rat said, "Goodbye!" and ran away. Since then, cats eat first and only then do their toilet.

Two other fairy tales explain why dogs and cats and why cats and mice are enemies:
DOG AND CAT

A dog and a cat once lived peacefully together in people's homes. The people were grateful to both of them and shared their food with them. Over time, however, the people forgot the animals' loyal service and soon gave them only bones to eat instead of meat.
So the dog and cat went to court to seek justice. A wise judge ruled: "Dogs and cats are more suited to eating meat than humans; humans should also eat vegetables and must give dogs and cats a sufficient portion of meat." This ruling was written down on parchment and handed to the plaintiffs so that they could prove their claim to meat at any time.
The animals went home happy. There they discussed how to keep the document safe so that humans could not find and destroy it. The dog advised placing the document under a large stone. "No," said the cat, "that won't work, how easily they can
Find it there, and if he doesn't find it, the moisture will destroy the parchment. I'll carry it under the rafters, where it's nice and dry, and no one goes there. The dog was satisfied, and the cat climbed onto the roof and hid the parchment under a batten. For several years, the people obeyed the ruling and gave the animals all the meat that came to their table.
But then they became more careless, and before long they had forgotten the judge's ruling, and dogs and cats were once again given only bones.
So the two decided to remind the humans of their duty, and the cat climbed up onto the roof to fetch the document. But when she got there, the mice had gnawed the parchment to pieces, so that it was no longer usable.

The two were therefore unable to prove their right to the humans and have had to make do with bones ever since.

The dog became angry with the cat, whose advice had caused the misfortune, and became its worst enemy, while the cat sought revenge on the mice and pursued them relentlessly because they had destroyed the document.

A Flemish legend explains the enmity between cats and mice more simply:

The cat was in distress and complained to Christ, who walked the earth, that it did not have enough food. Meanwhile, rats and mice ran past without saying hello. To punish their arrogance, Christ allowed the cat to eat rats and mice from then on.

A fairy tale recorded by the Brothers Grimm reports that the cat is even smarter than the fox:

THE FOX AND THE CAT

It happened that the cat met Mr. Fox in a forest, and because she thought, "He is clever and well-experienced and highly regarded in the world," she said kindly, "Good day, dear Mr. Fox, how are you? How are things? How are you getting by in these expensive times?"
The fox, full of pride, looked the cat up and down and did not know for a long time whether he should answer. Finally, he said: "O you poor bearded cleaner, you motley fool, you starving
and mouse hunter, what comes into your mind? How dare you ask how I am? What have you learned? How many arts do you understand?"

"I know only one," replied the cat modestly.
"What is that art?" asked the fox.
"When the dogs are after me, I can jump up a tree and save myself." "Is that all?" said the fox, "I am master of a hundred arts and have a sack full of tricks to boot. You make me sorry for you, come with me, I will teach you how to escape the dogs." Just then a hunter came along with four dogs. The cat nimbly jumped up a tree and sat in the top, where branches and foliage completely concealed her. "Open the sack, Mr. Fox, open the sack!" cried the cat, but the dogs had already seized him and held him fast. "Oh, Mr. Fox," cried the cat, "you are stuck with your hundred tricks.
If you could have climbed up like me, your life would not have been lost."

In Goethe's "Reineke Fuchs," on the other hand, the cat Hinze is not nearly as clever as the fox. He is even thoroughly tricked by the fox. Hinze was supposed to bring Reineke to court on behalf of the king, but he didn't prove to be particularly clever when he accepted the assignment: "When I go to him, how should I begin?" he asked the king, adding: "It would be better to send someone else, since I am so small. How should I end it? Oh! Please excuse me." However, the king would not be persuaded. He flattered Hinze: "Even if you are not a giant, you are still clever and learned." So the cat obeyed.

Reynard the Fox welcomed Hinze the cat with great kindness, called him his "beloved nephew," and asked him what his favorite food was. Hinze said, "Give me a mouse! That is what I like best," to which Reynard replied: "I can oblige you. My neighbor, the priest, has a barn in his yard, and there are mice in it." And he led the cat to a hole in the barn.

However, the fox had dug this hole the night before and stolen the priest's best rooster. The clergyman wanted revenge: he attached a snare behind the opening, expecting the thief to return.

Reynard knew and remembered this, and said: Beloved cousin, crawl straight into the opening; I will keep guard it while you steal away; you will catch them in the dark them in the dark. Oh! Hear how cheerfully they whistle!

Hinze jumped into the opening and fell into the snare. Outside, the fox mocked him, while inside, the household awoke, thinking the real thief had been caught, and beat the cat. Bloodied and blinded in one eye, Hinze returned to the king's court.

In another Grimm fairy tale, the cat proves to be more cunning than clever:

CAT AND MOUSE IN COMPANY

A cat had made the acquaintance of a mouse and told her so much about the great love and friendship she felt for her that the mouse finally agreed to live with her in one house and run a joint household. "But we must make provisions for the winter, otherwise we will go hungry," said the cat, "you little mouse cannot venture everywhere and will end up falling into a trap. The good advice was followed, and a pot of fat was purchased. But they did not know where to put it. Finally, after much deliberation, the cat said, "I know of no better place than the church, where no one would dare take

anything. We will put it under the altar and not touch it until we need it.
" The pot was thus brought to safety, but it wasn't long before the cat felt a craving for it and said to the mouse: "What I wanted to tell you, little mouse, is that my cousin has asked me to be godmother. She has given birth to a little boy, white with brown spots, and I am to hold him over the baptismal font. Let me go out today and you take care of the house alone." "Yes, yes," replied the mouse, "go in God's name, and if you eat anything good, think of me. I'd also like a drop of that sweet red wine they drink after childbirth." But none of this was true. The cat had no cousin and had not been asked to be godmother.
She went straight to the church, sneaked up to the fat pot, began to lick it, and licked the fat skin off. Then she took a walk on the roofs of the city, stretched out in the sun, and wiped her beard every time she thought of the fat pot. It was not until evening that she returned home.
"Well, there you are again," said the mouse, "you must have had a fun day." "It was okay," replied the cat.
"What name did the child get?" asked the mouse.
"Hautab," said the cat dryly.
"Hautab?" cried the mouse, "that's a strange and unusual name. Is it common in your family?" "What's wrong with it?" said the cat, "it's no worse than Bröseldieb, which is what your godparents are called."

Not long after, the cat was overcome by a craving again. She said to the mouse, "You must do me a favor and take care of the housework alone again. I have been asked to be godmother for the second time, and since the child has a white ring around its neck, I cannot refuse."
The good mouse agreed, but the cat crept behind the city wall to the church and ate half the fat pot.

"Nothing tastes better," she thought, "than what you eat yourself," and she was quite satisfied with her day's work.
When she came home, the mouse asked, "What was this child's name at baptism?" "Halbaus," replied the cat. "Halbaus! What are you saying? I've never heard that name in my life, and I bet it's not in the calendar."

The cat's mouth soon watered again for the delicacy. "All good things come in threes," she said to the mouse, "I'm to be godmother again. The child is completely black and only has white paws, no white hair anywhere else on its body. That only happens once every few years. You'll let me go out, won't you?" "Hautab! Halbaus!" replied the mouse, "they are such curious names, they make me so thoughtful." "There you sit at home in your dark gray fluffy skirt and your long braid," said the cat, "and you have no idea about anything. That's what happens when you don't go out during the day." The mouse tidied up and put the house in order while the cat was away. But the greedy cat ate the whole pot of fat. "Only when everything is eaten up can you have peace," she said to herself, and came home full and fat in the middle of the night. The mouse immediately asked what name the third child had been given. "You won't like it either," said the cat, "his name is Ganzaus." "Ganzaus!" cried the mouse, "that's the most alarming name I've ever heard, I've never seen it printed
before. Ganzaus! What does that mean?" She shook her head, curled up, and went to sleep.
From then on, no one wanted to ask the cat to be godfather, but when winter came and there was nothing left to find outside, the mouse remembered its store and said, "Come, cat, let's go to our pot of fat that we have

saved up.

It will taste good." "Yes," replied the cat, "it will taste as good as if you stuck your delicate tongue out of the window." They set off, and when they arrived, the pot was still in its place, but it was empty. "Oh," said the mouse, "now I see what has happened, now it's clear, you are my true friend!
You ate everything, just as you promised: first the skin, then half of it, then..." "Be quiet!" cried the cat, "one more word and I'll eat you!" "All gone," the poor mouse had already said, but no sooner had the words left her mouth than the cat pounced on her, grabbed her, and swallowed her whole. You see, that's how it is in the world.

To compensate for this story, the following fairy tale features a cat that earned its owner a lot of money but was unfortunately misunderstood:

THE THREE LUCKY CHILDREN
A father once called his three sons to him and gave the first a rooster, the second a scythe, and the third a cat. "I am already old," he said, "and my death is near, so I wanted to provide for you before I die. I have no money, and what I am giving you now seems to be of little value, but it is only important that you use it wisely; just find a country where such things are still unknown, and your fortune will be made." After their father's death, the eldest son set out with his rooster, but wherever he went, the rooster was already known. In the cities, he saw them sitting on towers from afar, turning with the wind, and in the villages, he heard more than one crowing, and no one was surprised by the animal, so it did not seem as if he would make his fortune with it.

Finally, however, he came to an island where the people knew nothing about roosters and did not even know how to tell time. They knew when it was morning or evening, but at night, unless they slept through it, no one knew what time it was. "Look," he said, "what a proud animal it is, with a ruby-red crown on its head and spurs like a knight. It calls you three times at certain times during the night, and when it calls the last time, the sun will soon rise. But when it calls in broad daylight, be prepared, for the weather will certainly change." The people liked this, they did not sleep all night and listened with great joy as the rooster called out the time loudly and clearly at two, four, and six o'clock. They asked him if the animal was for sale and how much he wanted for it. "About as much as a donkey can carry in gold," he replied. "A pittance for such a precious animal," they all exclaimed, and gladly gave him what he asked for.

When he came home with his riches, his brothers were amazed, and the second one said, "I'll go and see if I can sell my scythe for as much." But it didn't have the same appeal, for everywhere he went he met farmers who were as skilled with a scythe as he was. But in the end he succeeded on an island where the people knew nothing of scythes. When the grain was ripe there, they drove cannons up to the fields and shot it down. This was an uncertain business, for some shot over the top, while others hit the ears of corn instead of the stalks and shot them away. Much was destroyed in the process, and on top of that there was a terrible noise. Then the man stood there and mowed the grain so quietly and quickly that the people opened their mouths and noses in amazement. They were willing to give him what he asked for, and he got a horse loaded with as much gold

as it could carry.

Now the third brother wanted to find the right man for his cat. He fared the same as the others: as long as he remained on dry land, there was nothing to be done, for there were cats everywhere, and there were so many of them that the newborn kittens were usually drowned in water.
Finally, he had himself ferried to an island, and luckily, no cat had ever been seen there, yet the mice had become so numerous that they danced on the tables and benches, whether the master of the house was at home or not. The people complained bitterly about the plague, and even the king himself could not save himself from it in his castle. Mice whistled in every corner and gnawed on everything they could get their teeth on. Then the cat began its hunt and soon had cleared a few halls, and the people begged the king to buy the miraculous animal for the kingdom. The king gladly gave what was asked for, which was a mule loaded with gold, and the third brother came home with the greatest treasures.

The cat had a field day with the mice in the royal castle and killed so many that they could no longer be counted. Finally, she became hot from her work and thirsty. So she stopped, turned her head upward, and cried, "Meow, meow!" The king and all his people, when they heard the strange cry, were frightened and ran out of the castle in fear. Downstairs, the king held a council to decide what was best to do; finally, it was decided to send a herald to the cat and demand that she leave the castle or face violence.
The councilors said, "We would rather be plagued by mice, for we are accustomed to that evil, than surrender our lives to such a beast." A page had to go up and ask

the cat if it would willingly vacate the castle. But the cat, whose thirst had only grown greater, replied only, "Meow, meow." The page understood this to mean, "Absolutely not," and conveyed the answer to the king. "Well," said the councilors, "she shall be removed by force!"
Cannons were brought in and the house was set on fire. When the fire reached the hall where the cat was sitting, it happily jumped out of the window, but the besiegers did not stop until the whole castle had been blown to smithereens.

The cat in German literature

Probably the most famous fairy tale cat, who as a good goblin helped a poor farmer's son to become a king's daughter and kingdom, is Puss in Boots. Ludwig Tieck turned this fairy tale into the first "modern" play, a play in which an audience sits on stage and a second stage can be seen, in which poets, prompter, and actors appear and speak on their own behalf, in which directing mishaps occur that—if one does not know the text—are difficult to distinguish between real and staged.

The main character of the play is the cat Hinze, who confesses at the beginning that he understands human language very well and can also speak it himself, but has wisely kept this gift secret until now for the following reason: "What a dog has to do and learn! The horse! They are stupid animals that let their intelligence be noticed; they have to give in to their vanity. We cats are still the freest species because, despite all our skills, we know how to act so clumsy that humans give up trying to train us altogether."

And then Hinze the cat truly gives a demonstration of his skill! He transforms poor, disinherited Gottlieb into the Count of Carabas, finds him a princess who has already rejected a thousand and one suitors, and on top of that a kingdom, by eating the king of this country, who calls himself "Popanz" and has the ability to transform himself into all kinds of animals, when this "bogeyman" is sitting on his throne in the form of a mouse!

A direct descendant of Puss in Boots Hinze is the cat Murr, whom we already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Cat Murr, for his part, had famous descendants. The first was the cat Hidigeigei in Joseph Victor Scheffel's "The Trumpeter of Säckingen," also an educated, well-read, and poetic cat, and also not free from arrogance.

However, the height of megalomania was reached by the "super cat" named Carlo by Johannes Richard zur Megede. Carlo refers to Puss in Boots, Murr, and Hidigeigei as his ancestors, but smiles mildly at them and emphasizes what separates him from these ancestors. He is "Italian, diplomat, and hotel cat"; he has kindred spirits only among humans, e.g., Machiavelli and Talleyrand.

Puss in Boots and Murr the cat are creations of German Romanticism, which discovered a new sense of nature and also a new awareness of history. The Romantics brought old fairy tales and legends out of obscurity, discovered the literature of the High Middle Ages, and collected folk songs. Their love belonged to everything original and unadulterated.

Theodor Storm's poem about May kittens is famous, so famous and well-known that we need not quote it here. Heinrich Heine wrote poetry for "Mimi," who was not a "modest little bourgeois kitten" but a free cat; and even the melancholic dramatist Friedrich Hebbel, that relentlessly serious poet, wrote a poem to a kitten.

Wilhelm Busch shows the cat from a "bird's eye view":

A bird sits on the glue,
It flutters a lot and cannot get home.
A black tomcat creeps up,
Its claws sharp, its eyes glowing.
Up the tree and higher and higher
He comes closer and closer to the poor bird.
The bird thinks: Since that is the case,
And because the cat will eat me anyway,
I don't want to waste any time,
I want to chirp a little more
And whistle merrily as before.
The bird, it seems to me, has a sense of humor.

Rainer Maria Rilke described the cat as follows:

A ghost is still like a spot
where your gaze encounters a sound;
But there, on that black fur
your strongest gaze is dissolved:

Like a raging man, when in full
frenzy,
suddenly stops at the restraining padding
of a line and evaporates.

All the glances that ever met them
seem to be concealed within her,
in order to watch over them menacingly and morosely
and thus to sleep.

But suddenly she returns, as if awakened,
her face and right in the middle of yours:
and there you meet your gaze in the yellow

amber of her round eye stones
unexpectedly again: trapped
like an extinct insect.

The young romantic Wilhelm Hauff (1802-1827), who died at an early age, was a devoted cat lover. He owned two cats, "Fränze" and "Fritz." In the poet's final days, Fritz sat constantly on the sick man's bedspread, and when Hauff died, he held the animal in his arms.

The poet Peter Hille was completely infatuated with his white tomcat, named "Peter." The cat slept in the poet's bed every night, and when Hille wrote, Peter sat on the table. He couldn't do without the cat. When Peter disappeared for several days one spring, the poet's work came to a standstill. Hille was unable to finish a drama he was writing on commission in time, and a heated argument ensued with the publisher, who considered the poet's excuse, "I miss my cat!", to be a lame excuse. Fortunately, however, the cat reappeared, so that the play was completed after all, albeit with a delay.

It is thanks to a cat that world literature was enriched by the novels of Hedwig Courths-Mahler. The classic writer of sentimental novels once said:

Even before I started writing novels, I had a black cat with three white paws. And I actually owe him the impetus for my writing career. When I sat in my cozy apartment in the evening, my "Felix" played around me, caressed me, and purred, and I said to myself: all that's missing is a Courths-Mahler novel to make you happy and content with God and the world! You see, that's why I wrote my first novels, not to make money, as the detractors claim.

Theater cats

Most German theaters still have cats today to protect the scenery and costumes from mice. But time and again, these theater cats have felt the need to climb up from the lower and rear areas and step into the limelight themselves, "which means the world." It was during a performance of Johann Strauss' operetta "Die Fledermaus" in Leipzig, when, at the cue "My little birdhouse is very close by...", the theater cat leaped powerfully from the wings directly in front of the singer, who, startled and thrown off balance, stood there with his mouth open and couldn't utter a sound. Amid thunderous applause on the open stage, the cat scampered off into the prompter's box.

The black cat of the Royal Theater in Berlin was also always a great success when he appeared. He particularly enjoyed sniffing around stage corpses, whether they had been stabbed, shot, or poisoned, or even walking around the "dead bodies" with his tail raised, which often forced the "dead" to break character and involuntarily return to life.

The cat once made a particularly effective appearance in Lessing's tragedy "Emilia Galotti." Odoardo Galotti was in the middle of his monologue when, at the line "Who is laughing? By God, I think it was me," the theater cat appeared on stage. He approached Galotti from behind and rubbed himself amicably against his boots.
The actor tried to push the animal away, with the result that the cat arched its back and began to purr audibly.

Galotti finally saw himself compelled, after the line "Then I think something; something that can only be thought," to interject, "Damned beast, get away from me," which made little impression on the very friendly "beast." Finally, the poet's words came to the actor's : "Hideous, go away, go away!" Galotti calls to himself in the monologue. This time, the actor hurled these words at the cat in a terribly threatening voice and stamped his feet so fiercely that the animal was frightened and fled with great leaps!

The word "cat"

"The cat: the name of a well-known four-legged animal of both sexes" is found in an old dictionary. The "Grimm," the large German dictionary founded by the Brothers Grimm, says of it: "one of the most remarkable and question-rich words." The German word "Katze" probably comes from the Late Latin "catus." However, "catus" itself is not originally Latin, but an old Northern European Germanic word that replaced the traditional "felis" in Late Latin. "Katze" has conquered all European languages. In Spanish, cat and tomcat are called "gata" and "gato," in French "chatte" and "chat," in Russian "koschka" and "kot," in Serbian "kocka" and "kocor." The word has even found its way into Finnish and Estonian, two languages that do not belong to the Indo-European language family, as "katti" and "kat," as well as into Turkish, "kedy," and Armenian, "citto." It is unique that this Germanic word was even adopted by the classical ancient languages, after Late Latin also by Modern Greek, where the male cat is called "gata" and the female cat "katzi."

In the German-speaking world, however, the cat is not always called "Katze," but occasionally also "Bus" or "Buse," "Büsi"; above all, the cat is often called this. This word also occurs in English as "puss" or "pussy," which, together with "cat," gives us the more recent "pussycat." The cat is also called "Mietge" in Germany; in northern Italy, this word occurs as "micio" and "miccia." Berliners, never at a loss for a witty remark, also call cats "Dachhase" (roof rabbit), which comes from the fact that in the 19th century, dishonest butchers occasionally sold cat meat as rabbit meat.

Hence the following satirical verse, often sung by barrel organ players:

In many a kitchen, look
The hare on the spit,
But whether it meowed,
No one knows for sure!

In German, "Katze" can also refer to a lady's muff or purse, so that in thieves' cant, "eine Katze befreien" means to "free" the purse! In the older art of warfare, "eine Katze" was a siege weapon or a piece of fortification. Under a "cat," a movable protective roof carried by several men, the besiegers stormed a fortress or castle from which arrows, stones, and hot pitch rained down. Later, such "cats" were developed into mobile towers, which may have equipped with cannons. But the defenders also had their "cats": the entrenchments and elevated gun emplacements, which provided a good overview and a good field of fire, were called "cats." On the "cat," one lay in wait for the enemy like a cat waiting for a mouse.

"Kater" and "Katzenjammer" are terms used to describe that feeling of despondency and world-weariness that one wakes up with after a night of heavy drinking. The term probably comes from the fact that the reveler makes himself heard in the morning with groans and moans reminiscent of the nighttime wailing of cats. Gustav Michel finds moving words to describe the cat-like state:

"You lie as if on thorns, tossing and turning; soon your chin is hanging on your knees, soon you are supporting your leaden head with your hands; soon you are lying flat on your stomach, soon on your back, letting your arms stick out from your body like windmill blades, while your legs hang from your bed in strange resignation."

Even the cat Murr became acquainted with this world-weary feeling after enjoying an excess of "cat punch" in a "cat society" one night. Poets have often described this dreary situation, for example, Heinrich Heine:

The gray cloud
Rise from a sea of joy;
Today I must suffer for it,
That I was happy yesterday.
Alas! The nectar has turned
The nectar has turned to wormwood! Oh, how agonizing
The hangover, the misery
Weighing down my heart and stomach.

The Swiss poet Fridolin Tschudi wrote some particularly beautiful verses on this subject:

One would prefer to lie in a darkroom,
hermetically sealed against all light,
and moaning, surrender to the hangover
that pierces the brain with poison-tipped needles.

As soon as the stinging subsides, the head begins to
hammer,as if a thousand little devils were beating it;
one wants to drift away into nothingness,
to finally be released from the torment of hell.

But it continues to torment and torture you persistently and intensifies into unbearable, dull torment.
The evening, which had been so cheerful and student-like just a short time before,
seems totally wasted and dull the next day.

That is the essence of every hangover:
that, as a moral principle in a minor key,
is supposed to remind us painfully of the counterpoint
painfully remind us of the counterpoint.

Apart from "Katzenjammer," cats appear in countless idioms and expressions in the German language. One of the best known is "Es ist für die Katze" (it's for the cat), which is said of something that is superfluous or an effort that leads to nothing.

The saying is said to have the following origin:
A blacksmith once decided not to charge his customers a specific amount for his work, but to leave the payment to their discretion. However, the customers were content to settle their debt with a friendly "Thank you!". The blacksmith tied his well-fed cat up in the workshop and every time a customer left with empty words of thanks, he said: "Cat, I'll give you that!"

I'll give you this!" But the cat starved on this diet, and the blacksmith decided to demand his wages like any other craftsman from then on.
Of the many other German idioms and expressions about and with cats, here is just a small selection:

Someone who "washes like a cat" doesn't need much water to do so!

A "catfight" is a fierce quarrel and noisy squabble. A quarrelsome soldier is therefore called a "cat soldier." Someone who "can tolerate cats" causes trouble, and when someone comes home scratched and disheveled, people say, "He's been among the cats."

A grumpy person can be called a "grumpy cat."
Goethe said of the Duke of Alba: "The old tomcat looks as if he had eaten devils instead of mice."
In Swabia, someone who is not making any progress in business or work is given the advice: "Set cats on them and chase mice ahead!" according to the children's rhyme:

Johann, get going,
three cats ahead
three mice ahead
up the Blocksberg!

Dangerous and impertinent advice, on the other hand, is met with the question "Should I put a bell on the cat?" or dismissed with the remark "What does the cat know about Sunday?"

If you want to get to the bottom of something, stick to the saying:

Take your eyes in your hands and the cat on your knee!
What you don't see, she sees!

If a woman accidentally loses her virginity, people say, "She let the cat over the fence," and if she then chases her lover away, "She chases the cat from the bacon when it's eaten."
"Where is the cat sitting in the hay?" is a riddle. The answer is: "Where it sticks its tail out!"

In Germany, cats are not black at night as they are in Switzerland, but gray! Goethe wrote the verse:

Who knows the rogue in the deep night?
The cows are black, the cats are gray.

Whoever has to "hold the cat" must endure scratching and hissing without being able to flee or defend themselves.
In Lessing's "Minna von Barnhelm," the "chamber cat" says
Franziska says: "Yes, yes, the Major (Tellheim) must put up with Katz in the carriage, so he can't escape us."

A "cat's egg" is something that cannot be found, something that does not exist anywhere. That is why one can say, "With beautiful women, fidelity is a cat's egg!" If you want to urge a stupid person to hurry, you say to them, "Quick! Before the cat lays an egg!"

The alleged falsehood of the cat comes from the fact that false gold, silver, and ore are called "cat gold," "cat silver," and "cat ore." A false belief is also a "cat belief," and a "cat prayer does not go through the clouds," i.e., it does not penetrate heaven. The word "there you see the cat's paw" also alludes to falsehood: smooth and silky soft, but with hidden claws.

It is said that cat meat goes into the pot by itself.
That is why a girl says of an intrusive suitor who shows up uninvited: "He is like cat meat." However, the following verse advises one to be like cat meat, telling one how to behave when one encounters a virgin on the street:

Immediately seek her favor
Behave like cat meat!

A "cat's leap" is a short distance or a trifle.
Those who cannot eat properly must sit at the "cat table" on the "cat chair" and eat from the "cat plate."

The German cat under the protection of cat lovers

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the status of cats finally improved. One of the first to highlight the good sides of cats was Gustav Michel, whose "Book of Cats" we have already mentioned on occasion.
He cannot praise cats enough in it! He begins his book with an account of how he saved a tomcat from the wrath of the people:

We were sitting together happily, carefree and in good spirits, and had already emptied many a bottle, when we were suddenly startled out of our blissful mood by a long, drawn-out cry, similar to that of a child. A child's voice! A child outside on such a stormy night! We jumped up from our seats, rushed to the window, threw it open—and above us sat a black cat. Oh, those pale, mortally frightened faces, struggling to regain their composure and looking foolishly silly, and in the middle of the room, the blissfully purring cat! But the cold horror soon gave way to burning indignation. Out, cried the chorus, out with the black monster, and hot-blooded, busy hands grabbed sticks and umbrellas to chase away the poor stranger; but the cat must have sensed me as its protector, for it meowed imploringly at me, and my warm heart was won over! A strangely eloquent spirit came over me; in a fiery speech, I stood up for the oppressed creature, and when they wanted to silence me and my arguments, I cried out that I would defend not only this cat, but all cats on earth, that I would write an apology for the feline species, that I would—

Another person who recognized the virtues of cats early on was animal psychologist Peter Scheitlin. In his book "Versuch einer vollständigen Tierseelenkunde" (Attempt at a Complete Study of Animal Souls), published in 1840, he wrote about cats, among other things:

The cat is an animal of a higher nature. Even its physique indicates excellence. It is a small, cute lion, a tiger on a smaller scale. Everything about them is harmoniously constructed, no part is too large or too small; that is why even the smallest irregularity is noticeable. Everything is round; the most beautiful feature is the shape of the head, which can also be seen when the skull is exposed. No animal's head is more beautifully shaped. The forehead has a poetic arch, the entire skeleton is beautiful and indicates extraordinary agility and dexterity for undulating and graceful movements. Its bends are not zigzag or acute, and its turns are barely visible. It seems to have no bones and to be made only of light dough. Its sensory abilities are also great and perfectly match its body.
She is not a sociable creature, but a solitary one; she does not rejoice in victory and is never ashamed. When she is aware of a sin, she fears only the punishment. If she is severely scolded, she shakes her fur and returns unmolested after a few minutes. However, she feels quite flattered when, after her first hunting feat, she is warmly praised for bringing a mouse into the room and laying it before the eyes of the people. She will then continue to come into the room with her prey and show off her skills every time. It seems that a sense of honor begins in the cat species.

Organized protection of cats is provided by the Association of Cat Lovers in Germany, which organizes cat shows and publishes a magazine. The association fights against the superstitious practices that are still alive here and there.

It wants to prevent cats from being regarded as suppliers of meat or fur, and also from being used as guinea pigs in scientific experiments. For example, the association called for a protest rally when it became known that Fritz von Opel had given a cat as the first passenger in the prototype of a rocket car in 1928. The car crashed and burst into flames. What happened to the cat, however, is unclear. Cat lovers claimed that it had met a cruel death in the accident.

Fritz von Opel, on the other hand, who admitted to being a devoted cat lover, explained that the cat had been placed in the rocket car in a steel container specially made for it, which was designed to spring open in the event of an accident. That was indeed the case. However, the cat quietly escaped and was never found again!

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For your notes

For your notes

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Cat Man (Booklets)